ASIFA EAST

# ANYMATOR

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ANIMATED ARTS

# Kratky Films and The Art of Czechoslovak Animation

## With Jan Stibral

**Friday, February 14 - 6:00 P.M.**
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FEBRUARY 1992

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# Kratky Films and The Art of Czechoslovak Animation

Prague, October 23rd, 1991

Dear Mr. Gati:

Thank you very much for your kind letter, but my reply will not be an optimistic one, I am afraid. As you know, our country is going through great economic changes, which is reflecting itself very drastically especially in culture. The state has not means enough to support it, and the tax system does not work, which means that there are no sponsors. For our studios it means that they have had to giver up their own production and take over almost solely the production to order. Only the studio of the animated film has a slightly better position, because there is a great interest in cartoon films. There is almost no interest in the puppet films and the Jiri Trnka Studio is keeping itself above water only with great difficulties. There is real danger that all the specialists, without whom the professional puppet film cannot do, will be dispersed into other professions and later, when let us hope, the situation improves, it will be very difficult to assemble them. If you could find any work for our puppet studio, you would help us very much.

The general situation in the animated film which is really a sad one, is closely tied with the destiny of the Animafilm. It should take place in October 1992, but now it is almost sure that it will not be convened. If there happens a miracle and Animafilm takes place, I shall let you know in time.

Yours sincerely,
Jiri Kubicek

On October 3, 1991, I wrote to Mr. Jiri Kubicek, Head Art Director of Kratky Films and the Czech representative of ASIFA International. My question to him was about the date of the next Animafilm and workshop in Ceske Budejovice which I would like to attend. My surprise was his quick answer which is reprinted here and is rather dramatic.

In the mean time, however, Mr. Jan Stribral has coordinated a year-long tour of Kratky Films and Czechoslovak animation. Mr. Stribral will be supervising the art works, puppetry and films which represent Kratky Film & The Art of Czechoslovakia Animation. The presentation will deliver the latest in Czech animation and works in progress and will be showcased at various museums across the United States. Kratky Films is one of the most important animation studios in the world, certainly it is the finest in puppet animation. Since the early days with Trnka, Tyrlova, Zeman and Pojar, founders of the great Czech puppet animation school, up through the recent days with Svankmajer and Barta, they have had guaranteed success in all the international festivals, winning awards all over the world.

John Gati

# THE INDEPENDENCE OF INDEPENDENTS?

## An American animator's impressions of the National Film Board of Canada

### by Suzanne Dimant

**INTRODUCTION**

On Monday, July 2nd., 1990, not many Americans were aware that Canada was celebrating its Independence Day. Neither did the sound of July 4th. fireworks on Wednesday penetrate North of the border. Perhaps there is no international boundary so expansive and yet so distinct, representing subtle differences, but differences nonetheless.

Several motives brought me from New Jersey to Montreal the first week of July, one of which was a long-standing curiosity about the National Film Board of Canada. Most American animators have only a very general comprehension of what the Film Board is. They understand that it is government-funded, and often can list the names of a few animators they think are there....or WERE there. Still, it seems appropriate that while the U.S. independent filmmaker-community fidgets before the newborn Independent Television Service (ITVS), we Americans examine the structures within which media arts of other nations are supported.

The National Film Board was founded in 1939 as a documentary production studio. With the onset of World War II, it became an instrument for the making of anti-Nazi propaganda films. It was during that period that John Grierson, the first Commisioner, brought the Film Board's first animator over from Scotland: Norman Mc Laren. One has to wonder whether the famous "Neighbors" was McLaren's way of compensating for having had been forced to work on anti-Nazi films.

Without even having been told, one could sense the remnants of a McLaren retrospective concurrent with the sentiment of the Film Board's 50th. anniversary in 1989. A brass and marble plaque in the foyer, window displays, even an encased arrangement of McLaren's own studio furnishings all boasted of one of Canada's great innovators. The encasement has since been reverted to a regular office space. Appropiate to its documentary genesis, the English animation department had also been supporting the production of Don Mc Williams' documentary, "The Creative Process: Norman Mc Laren". Mc Williams supplemented the Film Board's support with pre-sales to Canadian (CBC) and British (Channel 4) television.

Unofficially, "The Creative Process" had its American debut in the form of a benefit-screening for the Leo Dratfield Endowment. The more official debut, however, was at MOMA, in May of 1991.

At the time of my Canadian visit, the English animation department was in an uneasy transition period. Doug Mc Donald had left the post of Executive Producer in May, and Bill Pettigrew was temporarily in charge. Applicants for this well-defined administrative role were soon to be interviewed. I sensed the slim possibility that someone with an ambitious temperment could actually utilize such a role as a tool for, ever so slightly, effecting the nature of funding and distributing Canadian animation as a whole. At the risk of appearing biased, however, I must note that, in general, administrative personalities more often serve as restrictive valves than as unobstructive amplifiers of the creative energy they represent.

This can be attributed as much to the over-specialization of industrialized nations as to the European history of artist-sponsor relationships. When we departmentalize creative from administrative roles, we perhaps over-dicholomize human personality. The best arts administrators are actually the best artists, and visa versa. (Entrepeneurship is a creative attitude; let Walt Disney stand as paradigm!)

Barrie Angus McLean has been Executive Producer of Studio A (the English animation dept.) since the fall of 1990. He has plenty of first-hand filmmaking experience, both in documentary and animation genres, and seems to be quite popular among the animators, although some bemoan his environmental-theme prejudices.

## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

According to Bill Pettigrew's analysis, most Americans perceive the Film Board as a "glorified cooperative" of sorts, whereas it is, rather, a "functioning studio". As opposed to a media center in which emphasis is placed upon providing local filmmakers with access to equipment and/or showcase for their work, the Film Board does indeed place its priorities on PRODUCTION.

The funds are filtered through the Canadian Department of Communications, to the FB Commisioner, to the Directors of Production of the English and French animation departments, to Executive Producers (such as Barrie McLean). Under the Executive Producers are the Animation Directors, both Staff and Freelance. Theoretically there would be animators under the Animation Directors, but in practice this is rare, since Animation Directors generally do their own animation. The Directors submit proposed concepts, budgets and production schedules to their Executive Producers. Even the storyboarding stage must obey pre-approved deadlines. By the same token, straying from the limits of budget and schedule is so common it is almost expected, and requests for extensions of time and funds are rarely refused.

Although they must account for their weekly accomplishments by submitting a Time Sheet to their Studio Administrator, the animators' dedication to quality seems to stem naturally from a sense of gratitude for their priviledges. The staff animators have what are essentially unquestioned, permanent 'places' at the Film Board...not at all contingent upon the approval of their 'pitches'. Rejected or criticized proposals are simply revised or replaced by alternative concepts.

I can't help but liken the staff animators to a warren of rabbits encountered by the refugee-warren in the film "Watership Down". The refugees are seduced into accepting shelter from those in the warren, who are apparently living under utopian conditions. Carrots are deposited from an anonymous human provider, which attracts the rabbits to the surrounding snare-infested fields. They adopt a world-view of passive acceptance, deny the proximate peril....and remain prisoners of their dependency. The sublime message applies equally to communal rabbits as it does to state-funded artists: the price of comfortable dependency is the right of self-determination. At the risk of sounding too patriotic, isn't that why the American Revolution was fought?

## DISTRIBUTION

Although their proposals may be received more enthusiastically if they include viable distribution schemes, the animator sacrifices entire copyright to the NFB. The marketability of a film is therefore only of secondary concern to the director, for they are essentially government employees. Informally, the distribution department welcomes suggestions from the filmmakers. The Film Board has enjoyed relative success distributing thematic compilations, so that films that compliment either completed or in-progress works may get special attention. At times, the animator is even asked to help design promotional material.

In reaction to general spending cutbacks in the Arts during the past decade, ex-Commisioner Francois Macerola amputated the international role of the Film Board by eliminating many of its international offices. Several of these offices had functioned as distribution arms, and their disappearance created a vacuum to be filled by foreign distributors. Periodically, the Film Board publicizes a series of new films for open-bidding.

## EQUIPMENT

In designing their proposals, individual directors estimate the camera-time they will need, but it is the Executive Producer that worries, if at all, about the equation of equipment-time to actual rental-expense. Convoluted as the process may appear, the camera-person's wage is generally kept in balance with the actual demand of the 'projects' upon the equipment, so that the actual exchange appears almost invisible, all neatly orchestrated by administrators and legislators.

The English animation department is blessed with 10 animation-stands, four of which have no camera-people assigned. These four are usually 'occupied' by a single animator, working 'under the camera', in a style that justifies this monopoly. For her recently completed paint-on-glass film, "Strings", for example, freelancer Wendy Tilby occupied a camera-room for four years! One would expect jealous protests from the other animators, but the 6 other cameras, nearly always in operation, seem to amply meet the others' needs. These cameras also serve the titling requirements of other Film Board departments, including the more modestly equipped French animation department, as well as the more transient freelancers. In the wee-hours, there stalks a lesser-

continued on next page

known and lowerclass Film Board citizen....the diligent recipients of "PAF" status. PAF, which in French stands for Filmmakers Assistance Plan, is a means of allocating excess equipment-time to local independent filmmakers. What are the odds of an American crossing the border to weasel-in on PAF? Put it this way: the Film Board is very nationalistic.

Although they have fewer animation-stands, the French boast a computer-graphics lab, as well as a handful of talented programmers. Another commonly-heard differentiation is that that French films are more experimental, whereas the English seem to cling to more narrative criteria. Perhaps this difference stems from the confidence English directors have in the universality of their language. Perhaps not.

## SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Basically, the staff animator is a government-funded artist. Thus, decreasing government funds and the devaluation of the artist's social status endanger the "staff animator" as a "species". The ratio of freelancers over staff animators has noticeably increased over the last 20 years. The French animation department recently reversed this trend by hiring 5 young animators. However, when a staff member leaves, he or she is generally NOT replaced. In this regard, Studio A is becoming more like the Canadian private studios which usually cannot afford constant staffs and rely heavily upon freelance skill. The freelancers are often members of ACTRA, an actor's union.

Although the staff animators communize through an internal union called the SGCT, the union itself was formed primarily to meet a legislative requirement that all Canadian workers be represented. The staff animators preferred the self-sufficiency of an internal union, as opposed to external trade guild. For artists who are skilled in several crafts, it would have been inconvenient to have to choose between specialized guilds. To an American animator, the SGCT appears more like a Committee than a union.....in any case it starkly contrasts E.coast advocacy groups (i.e AIVF; Media Alliance) or Hollywood trade unions. The lowest level of mangement with which the SGCT deals is the Executive Producer, who in turn may deal more directly with government departments.

At one time, when the Film Board was represented through a laison office in Ottawa, the balance between 'auteur' and sponsored films was more level. Since then, however private industry competed with the Film Board for government contracts, finally impelling a 50% limit on the Film Board's share of the pie. Presently, this percent has shrunk down to almost nothing.

Despite it's federally-based origins, self-sufficiency seems to be the code to the Film Board's present survival. The Film Board has its own own art supply store, at which the animators charge their material expenses to specific credit-accounts, referred to by assigned production numbers. (There is even a larger art supply store downtown that respects these production numbers!) Production and post-production services are all in-house, including a mixing studio and processing lab! Gorgeous posters are printed in the distribution and marketing arenas.

And yet, from the artist's perspective the ancillary advantage of self-containment is: COMMUNITY. It is a need so ephemeral that it is hard to explain to non-artists. It is an identification process as much as it is a sound business structure. The value of building and maintaining such communities relies, perhaps too heavily, upon inconstant government attitudes towards the status of the artist in society. In general, arts advocacy requires sensitivity to how international relationships are economically and politically influencing the policy-priorities of one's own government.

Whereas ITVS may indeed divert CPB funds to the independent community, it is nonentheless a disparate and disorganized community. If the networking-potential of technology is to be any consolation, it will only be so if a constant and reliable showcasing format for national television can be organized. Still, what American animators lack is a forum....a setting in which to show works-in-progress.....to argue philosophy and technique. Perhaps if the Society of Animation Studies would make its papers available for purchase, or solicit subscriptions, at least we'd have a written forum of sorts. Or how about an ASIFA-administered version of the Robert Flaherty workshops for mature screenwriters? In the interum, my best advice is for American animators to recognize themselves as members of a minority, and to, among themselves, form sane friendships and empowering alliances.

## AN AMERICAN REPLICA?

Across the board, the type of media production facilities that most steadfastly survive are those which, in their structural essences, mirror their politico-economic environments. Walt Disney Studios may therefore seem as Capitalist as Zagreb

Films (Yugoslavia), Polonia Films (Poland), Kratky Films (Czechoslavakia) and Jiri Trnka's puppet-studio (Czechoslavakia) seem Communist. At first glance, the Film Board appears to be a balanced hybrid of the two extreme Communist\Capitalist models.

However, this type of analysis is limited by the notion that Pure versions of either centralization\laissez faire extreme actually exist on this planet. Some general observations on the conglomerate nature of national arts-spending follow:

1. The Disney Studios managed to pull themselves out of economic disaster by getting work from the government during WWII.
2. Many E. European studios have produced Saturday-morning-like schlock for sale and profit.
3. The National Film Board was created by a conservative government.
4. The U.S. government's major source of arts funding is to military bands.
5. The most popular syndicated show in Russia BEFORE peristroyka and glasnost was "Wheel of Fortune".

The year 1990 brought significant changes in government sponsorship of the arts, both in America and in Eastern Europe. The NEA, as well as state arts councils, suffered severe budget-cuts. Meanwhile, many East-European state-controlled animation studios have been thrust into the cold waters of free enterprise. The National Film Board of Canada is no exception to this trend. For the past 15 years, government backing has been gradually shrinking. So long as the Canadian government continues to view the exceptional 'product' of the Film Board as a source of national pride, the NFB will not need to worry itself with a strategy for economic independence.

For an American media-facility to more consciously match the Jeffersonian ideal, its funding base would be as triangular, (and therefore as dynamic and hardy) as the U.S. Government. It would be partly a business and partly a government agency, being as impelled by profit-motive as it is nestled by tax-dollars. It would carefully balance its government and corporate support against its own capital reinvestments, allowing itself the inalienable right to ride inflation. Personally, I imagine that cutting Education's apron-strings to Government would indirectly encourage competition in the Arts, as would "antialiasing" our steep tax-brackets. The methods are actually too multiple to postulate; what is most important is to understand the symbiotic relationship between any economy's various sectors, and to thus emphasize that an economy's overall health suffers when INDUSTRY is permitted to dominate CULTURE.

Perhaps, in the wake of glasnost, it is not innappropriate to refer to Marx's tenet that Capitalism and War are interdependent. Perhaps it is time to come to terms with Competition as a force of Nature, and thus to more consciously attempt to corall this force towards constructive, rather than destructive aims. If American independent animators have a single lesson to learn by studying the National Film Board, it is that to coalesce and attempt to mold a distinctly American genre, (even if this genre were chiefly characterized by pluralism), would be a self-protective strategy. In general, a deeper appreciation of our cultural resources would signify a maturation of our young nation.

In general, romanticizing the "starving artist" archetype only weakens the artist's social status. Now more than ever before in history do artists need to identify their markets, and address them more powerfully and directly. To understand that artists are not immune from the laws of economics, and that one type of patron is not any less polluting than another, is to gain at once both a bitter realism and a compulsion for self-empowerment. Our Bill of Rights states that we are each entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Adequate medical care should be a sub-category of 'Life', just as 'the Arts' ought to fall under the 'Pursuit of Happiness'. No more Puritan iconoclasm, please! Joy is both a legitimate pursuit and a marketable product.

c. Suzanne Dimant. 1991.

# David Ehrlich EAST COAST

## Part Three

Ever since I had seen Lejf Marcussen's PUBLIC VOICE at Annecy in 1989, and his retrospective at Ottawa in 1990, I had wanted to invite him to the U.S. MoMA's show of his films this past November served as the nucleus for an American tour, and I had the real treat of spending two weeks with Lejf, watching his films again and again with different audiences, and having extensive discussions with him on everything from independent animation to Stalinism. What follows is a composite of recorded interviews with Lejf on the subject of independence and his own work. I thought it would fit well into this column, as a European perspective on what is normally assumed to be an American theme.

DAVID: Lejf, you understand why we American independent animators classify ourselves in this way. Do you feel you are a "Danish independent animator"?

LEJF: In my terms, I am independent. In your terms, no. I have a salary every month from Public TV, so I am not independent in the American way. But no one forces me to illustrate a message. They want me to make Animation Art. I am independent in the artistic way, and my station can sell my films (or more precisely, they can exchange my films for programs from other TV stations.) The minimum price for films is, as you may know, very low, because TV stations simply exchange their own productions for what they want. That is why independent short film producers can barely make a living. That cultural situation narrows down the artistic works to just those pieces that lend themselves to market analysis and are more precisely dramatic art, because they begin in a verbal sphere, as opposed to visual art, which is non-verbal.

Public-TV still differs from commercial TV in many ways. Of course they feel more aesthetic responsibility. My films have been sold to 15 European public TV stations and have been broadcast in prime-time and NOT as filler. That for me proves that the market is more intelligent than the verbal marketing surveys would lead one to believe. Unfortunately for artists, however, the inevitable process leading to the absorption of art is first experimentation, then words, then market analysis, then paralysis. First pure art, then applied art and design, I wish I could say, first public TV, then commercial TV, but today I can't. Public TV is journalistic too, just utilizing our pure design capabilities for greater credibility.

D: You say you are independent. Can your Public TV station fire you?

L: Yes, but they wouldn't, for very practical reasons. They need me to make artistic films so they have something to exchange with other European Public TV stations. They can then enlarge their repertoire of programs at no extra cost.

D: Have you ever been pressured or otherwise influenced to change a film?

L: Never. My situation is unique in Denmark, and has been for 16 years until this year when the studio added two artistic video animators, working under me.

D: If there were economic problems at the station, and they told you a percentage of your time should be spent not on artistic films, but on doing news graphics, for example, what would you do?

L: Tell them they're idiots because they wouldn't have more money putting me to that kind of work. More money would come from the work I'm doing now, in the equivalent value of the programs for which they exchange my work.

D: If they had no money to pay you, what would you do?

L: I would go on Welfare!

D: I don't believe it. Wouldn't Welfare force you to get some job?

L: Yes.

D: And if there were no job in artistic but only in commercial animation, and they said no job, no Welfare?

L: I'd try to be a painter again.

D: Lejf, you saw Sky David's and Flip Johnson's MTV logos. Did you like them?

L: Yes. It shows that without experimental animation, you cannot develop applied animation. That's why artistic animators are important to TV stations.

D: Were these MTV segments independent?

L: Not in my way, because they had a message. But they could not have made them without artistic independence.

D: Suppose an independent makes a film with his own message, paid by no one. Is this an independent film?

L: No. It's propaganda for his verbal idea. It magnifies what he already knows.

D: PUBLIC VOICE, in a way, is propaganda for an intuitive approach to the appreciation of art. So, is this film an independent artwork?

L: No. All art is propaganda for art.

D: OK, then it is impossible for an artist to be independent?

L: From this angle, yes. But I am not doing propaganda for the verbal universe.

D: But aren't you making propaganda against Nazis, Stalinists, words and the concept of polarities? Your films are verbally stimulating. You are anti-polarity, but you, yourself seem to split people into Nazi and non-Nazi.

L: No, I don't. We are all Nazis and racists. So there is a moral imperative within me to do the films I do. The Nazi in me wishes to dictate to me my art. The Nazi in me wishes me to make an "I know a truth" film, a "believe me" film, a "follow me" film, and I do have to fight against it.

D: So you are not yet independent of your inner compul-

# INDEPENDENTS:

sions?
L: Nobody is.
D: But you are independent of external economic and political influence.
L: Yes.
D: Any final thoughts?
L: I show Gestalts I myself find beautiful, scary, fascinating,etc. I compose with them, manipulate them, and my message is, "Here they are, they are fascinating aren't they? Don't believe the words that normally accompany them. Words are just an attempt to get closer and closer to the real thing (universe an sich). People who actually believe in them intrinsically are dangerous."

I am not a story-teller. I am just an artist who started quite late in my career to make animated films, and I still consider myself primarily a visual artist. Parts of Europe have had the bitter experience of knowing the disastrous results of subjecting their artists to the total domination of prose - whether induced by national or ideological narrow-mindedness. I have lived in such close contact with these ridiculous demands of putting free art into a straight-jacket of dogma, that they have become natural Gestalts in some of my films. Three of them have actually been composed on the schism between fine art and applied art. I should, therefore like to quote the exiled Czech author, Milan Kundera, who once had to flee from a regime which permitted only applied art. He said, that if the artist starts with the contents which he then puts into a form, he will only magnify what he already knows. If on the other hand, the artist starts by searching within a form, he risks discovering something which he did not already know. My films have been inspired in this vein.
D: And seem to me to be quite independent of everything except the organic response to the particular forms and Gestalts within which you choose to work.

## Part Four

I've been receiving a number of vigorous replies to the first few columns. John Schnall, independent animator from New Jersey, whose macabre films have been gracing Expanded's TOURNEES OF ANIMATION, wrote the following page:

"An independent animator makes independent films. It's that simple. Sure s/he can make commissioned films, or do anything else for money. But the independents I know use that money to get by while they make their films. Even independents who have turned their talents to a successful commercial career, such as George Griffin, always seem to have their personal projects going on.

"'O.K., smart guy, so what's an independent film?' I'm glad you asked that. An independent film is one where the artist's personal expression dictates all elements of the film, regardless of how it's funded. As a rule, though a television spot may be in an independent's style, the independent films don't say "MTV" in them.

"It's getting more and more common for the corporate world to buy an independent film and turn it into something else. For instance, Bill Plympton's "Push Comes to Shove" is an independent film (part of his independent feature). MTV has re-edited the film into excerpts (presumably the adolescent mind has a short attention span - television is turning this concept into a self-fulfilling prophesy). Though Bill is well-credited, I see the re-edited film as part of MTV's self-promotion campaign rather than Bill's oeuvre.

"A more subtle example: a corporation (I think it was American Express) replaced their unsuccessful theatrical ad campaign (no one likes commercials in movie theaters) with a short film, "Knick Knack". A title card explained that the film is being brought to us by American Express (or whatever). Despite the scale and cost of this particular computer film, I see it as an independent production. The film itself is not trying to "sell" anything. Does that title card turn the film into something less independent? I think it does. When shown in this context, the film becomes a plug for the goodwill and kind hearts behind this corporation: "I should use this credit card. They show such charming films." Of course, I'm not saying this kind of film sale is "bad", especially if it encourages more independent production. I do feel the film loses its independent nature when seen in this context.

"There's an even more insidious way in which we all lose our independence. There are now an unusally large number of places for our independent work to be seen, such as Tournees, Liquid Television, Channel 4 in England, The Festival of Animation,etc. These venues pay reasonably well. Independent films won't make you rich, but they are now a viable commercial product. I think that's great. The danger comes from letting the market dictate the content of the film. We all do this. "If the film's less than 10 minutes, I can sell it as filler for cable" (remember those days?), "if I keep it short and hip, maybe MTV will buy it", "I hope it's weird enough to sell to Channel 4." Whatever. It's good to keep the audience in mind, but I believe we all lose something when we let the venue dictate how we make the film. If we make the best films we can, on our own terms, they'll find a place to be seen."

John brought up a number of issues that I'd like to explore further.

1) "But the independents I know use that money to get by while they make their films." 'Get by' brings to mind paying the rent, medical insurance, food bills, lab costs.

Continued on page 15

# MALAISE IN BO

## New York Animation Is Ailing, And You

### By Steven D

A great deal of thoughtful writing has appeared in the ASIFA Newsletter of late on the nature of the Independent filmmaker, about several busy animation artists going at it in a big way, and a lot of good natured banter about what a fine business we're all engaged in; but despite the best face put forward here in this modest journal, the animation community here in New York is going through a difficult situation. We won't be addressing the nature of animation as art here, simple commerce is our topic.

A quick perusal of any number of trade journals today will tell you that we are in the midst of an animation boom. Look for yourself at the many and varied types of good news and you might agree: Disney and Universal both had major releases of feature-length animation. **Beauty & The Beast** continues to hold forth as one of the top moneymakers for the season, and Disney has committed to completing a new animated feature a year: **Aladdin** is due in late '92. **The Simpsons** continues to draw big numbers on Thursday nights and remains enough of a sit-com phenomenon that several other animated prime-time series are either being produced or are under consideration by other networks. Nickelodeon, spurred by the success of its Sunday morning *Nicktoons* programming-block, plans to cough up a whopping $40-million for new original animation and expand its Sunday programming to two hours this year. Nickelodeon has drawn consistently higher ratings with its new programming (and using wholly-owned properties, too), and its **Ren & Stimpy** recently crossed-over to debut in prime time on Nick's sister-channel, MTV. (Amazingly, *Nicktoons* overwhelmingly outdraws *This Week With David Brinkley* among 2-5 year olds. Go figure.) TBS' recent acquisition of Hanna-Barbera and its library was followed by an announcement that Turner is planning an all-animation cable channel. Expanded Entertainment has done very well by regionally releasing a small number of prints of anthologies of short animation and thereby exposing the general public to films often only seen by other animators and animation-mavens, films they might not otherwise get a chance to see. The commercial production journals and magazines are bursting with information about effects– and animation-producers flaunting the newest technologies.

Okay, there's your good news. Strap yourselves in, because now we're going to get a healthy dose of the real world.

A long-time fixture of New York animation I spoke with recently summed it up: "Everybody's out of work, on both coasts," he said, though admittedly he generalizes. Another veteran animator, after more than twenty-five years of freelancing in the business, says that he's never seen it as bad as it is right now. He'd been out of work for four months when we spoke. This past year alone, two major studios lost reps and/or producers and directors who thought they'd fare better on their own than suffer along with their sizeable former workplaces. As many enterprising independents have learned, these break-offs see that they can be more competitive, with lower overhead, than a larger studio is able to be, often hiring the same people. One of these studios recently went through a bloodletting in which several long-time salaried staffers found themselves suddenly candidates for unemployment. A start-up studio created to produce one of Nickelodeon's new series has suddenly found itself with significantly less work: production on its series will now be handled overseas. Warner Brothers New York facility, producing new animation featuring the Warner's characters was, as recently as this fall, reduced to a skeleton crew and has now closed completely. Across the continent, in the sunny capitol of network animation, in fact, the signs are also less than hopeful: NBC has lost money on its Saturday morning schedule and, dissatisfied with that morning's ratings (the kiddies, apparently, cannot effectively work the people-meters Nielsen provides to measure their TV watching, much to the networks dismay), has already announced that it will be eliminating two hours of children's programming (read: cartoons and consequently the jobs to produce them) from its Saturday AM schedule and replacing it with news programming. Any of you can no doubt add horror stories of your own. New York's large production houses are hurting for work, and consequently that pain is being spread downward to the army of freelance and staff animators, assistants and production people, many of them young, who thought they had a long-term job and are increasingly finding themselves with little or no work.

More than one once-large studio has pared-down, moved into smaller space, sold technical assets, released staff. The principal of a Clio-winning though work-starved animation studio, after freelancing herself around, now considers moving with her family out of New York altogether. Several young freelance (or recently-fired) animators and related production types echo her sentiment; many mention California as a sort of End-Of-The-Rainbow in the exasperatedly hopeful manner of one whose options have simply run out. The nature of "independent" work has changed as well. As mentioned above, smaller, leaner production entities are finding that the money-tight market means they are again viable competitors for a wider variety of jobs. The label of "independent" is increasingly dependent upon the nature of the job. Got a job or a film you're doing on your own today? You're an independent. No work? Get a call from a studio tomorrow? You're an employee. Those studios that have remained vital are either widely diversified and at the cutting edge of emergent technology, like R/Greenberg, or are leaner and more concentrated, like Michael Sporn Animation, with strength in delivering a particular type of work for which it is very well known to a fairly constant roster of clients. These studios and most others are finding that the number of resumés they are receiving is on the upswing, and not simply coming from kids just out of school.

What is really going on? Some of the blame can easily be attributed to the recession. But that's not the entire story. Sporn's studio, as only one example, has weathered the overall economic downturn and he does not foresee having to cut back to the extent that some other studios, perhaps more dependent on commercial-type work, have been forced to. But one senti

# OOMTOWN

## Don't Look Too Good Yourself

## ovas

ment that he expressed that was echoed by several others, across a wide range of experience and time in this business, was that a new way of thinking was required in order to keep moving forward in a field that ever pitches and shifts from one direction to another.

The *business* of animation seems to be thriving, at least as evinced by the kinds of stories in the second paragraph. But the hands at work, well, increasingly, they've been idle. In terms of the cyclical nature of the business end of this art form, stretches of down-time have hit before, and hit hard. Invariably, one or a number of large studios or big jobs float into town and suddenly everyone connected with it thinks that it's never going to end, that their career is made. Life is beautiful.

Then it ends.

It just so happened this time around that everything ended at once, at a time when money is tight in general, when *no one* is doing particularly well. A studio that has landed an ample job tries to maintain the prodigious output required by sending much of the work overseas without an eye toward keeping the quality high and the job financially viable finds, to its dismay, that the business suits see more money to be made by sending the whole job overseas, leaving *no* work locally. The argument is made that you simply can't produce long-form animation domestically and make any money. But this argument is typically short-sighted, exemplary of those who would cash-in up front without a thought toward the state of the business around them. Better filmmaking, budgetarily responsible and kept local with an eye on the long-term would on the other hand end up bringing *more* money in, keep more people working, and working longer.

Nickelodeon stated when it began its *Nicktoons* project that it was seeking to produce new animation of quality and, if at all possible, make New York a center for animation production once again. This is a fine and honorable aspiration, but nobody running Nickelodeon is fool enough to think that good cartoons alone will make their $40–million investment pay off. Nickelodeon was quick to make it clear to potential developers of its new series' that the network would fully own all properties connected with the new shows. Nickelodeon's promotional materials sent to ad agencies tout the extensive list of licensed-merchandise that the stations various trademarks and characters are attached to. Blind avarice, you say? Hardly. Today, it is simply the only way to do business. Especially with long-form productions, licensing money makes production possible. At the crest of the animation–boom wave you'll see a roiling heap of licensed debris bearing the pointy–haired puss of Bart Simpson, each item with its price-tag attached. There may still be some Turtles in that soup, too. When the returns began to come in on how much those properties were making for their initiators, the wave began. With few exceptions every new idea slated for production is inspected and dissected for licensing potential. An animation enthusiast can only be glad for Nickelodeon's commitment to keep the quality of its productions high, and hope other producers will do the same.

The Skyshapers studio, by all appearances a place that hasn't yet learned that there's a recession, is currently producing a series of short videos specifically designed, in the words of Skyshapers president and project director Ellie Dylan, to "impact the future of kids in a positive way," by promoting physical fitness, self-esteem and good health and nutrition. The videos will serve to introduce the Skyshapers characters and concepts as part of an in-school program that Dylan says will begin nation-wide and soon go international. Speaking with her, one is struck by an almost evangelical drive she feels toward the Skyshapers idea, as well as her smooth salesmanlike delivery when describing the concept. Her enthusiasm is almost infectious. It comes as no surprise, then, that she is hard at work (and has already had some success) selling the concept to potential corporate sponsors. What *is* surprising is that she has very high standards pertaining to what kinds of sponsorship Skyshapers will accept. In the same way, she will evaluate a prospective employee in terms of whether he or she has the potential to be a "Skyshaper," to relate to the ideals of the concept, in addition to their studio skills. Viewing commercial success as a means to an end, Dylan is seeking to license Skyshapers characters extensively, and she speaks about multiple product-lines, a feature film, and the potential for a television series. Dylan has assembled and run Skyshapers for the past six years primarily by funding from private investors and so has been able to mold a highly personal vision for the production to follow. But this also means the production has been insulated from the vagaries of the commercial market. Government involvement and surprisingly positive response from school systems nationwide means that Dylan's project will make its educational debut to a wide audience. Dylan sincerely believes her project has the capacity for doing great good for children, as well the commercial potential to be "the Muppets of the 90's."

Is Skyshapers doing any good for animation in New York? Dylan is directing the limited-animation and has final approval over everything that gets done. Kevin Mercado, late of Broadcast Arts, has been Production Manager at Skyshapers since mid–'91. He admits that Dylan's on-the-job learning experience as a director requires flexibility on the part of some animators. Artists I spoke to that were no longer at Skyshapers said they found the work "frustrating" and could not bend to Dylan's "be-a-team-player" attitude. Mercado thinks that is attributable to Dylan's admittedly opinionated point-of-view. The sizeable crew of young animators and assistants that *is* there, however, is always busy and seems to have the same enthusiasm for the project that their director does. Dylan says she is actively seeking more staff, and Mercado is confident that the work will go smoother as time goes on. He also stresses that he finds the rates "comparable" to other studios; Dylan says she wants to be "competitive". Dylan's approach is a new one. The production has been slow but steady in getting started, and from the perspective of providing employment, it has worked so far. Everyone I spoke with, regardless of their other opinions, agreed that Skyshapers has great potential as an educational program for in-school use. It remains to be seen how much farther Dylan and her company can take the project.

It is perhaps too easy for a jaded animation-vet to fault

# INDEPENDENT BULLETIN

## By Ray Kosarin

John Schnall has just returned from the Cinanima festival in Portugal, which presented his newest short, "Grim." Briefly, "Grim" is about a day in the life of Death. Schnall depicts the Grim Reaper as an (almost) ordinary guy like everybody else, even if his occupation is a little unusual. The idea came to Schnall while he was in Zagreb seeing "many, many interesting films. During one that wasn't interesting, I thought it would be interesting to do everybody waking up - - Santa Claus, Death - - so you didn't realize who they are until they put on their outfit."

For "Grim" Schnall explored a variety of art techniques. "Grim" is an attempt to break out of a sort of rut I was in and use a whole bunch of different styles to tell the story, because the story's in different episodes." In one scene, Death walks through a frame which is totally white, except for a dark aura which follows him like a spotlight. Schnall traced the background on each drawing in white pencil and colored loosely on top with marker, so that details of the background become revealed as Death passes them by. In another scene, to create a marbled texture for the sky, Schnall dropped colored dyes on a pan of oil and laid paper on top. And in a scene where Death encounters a homeless man, Schnall combined drawn animation with xeroxed photographs of a Silly Putty face.

Schnall says that sound strongly influenced the mood of the film. Wistful rather than frightening, the soundtrack consists of variations on a single musical theme. Besides solo piano which suggests, for one episode, a silent movie, there are music boxes, an ersatz 78 rpm record, and tape loops of screams slowed down and played backwards. Because he conceived the film as a series of gags about Death, Schnall says, "It wasn't until the soundtrack that it became, really, a sad film." When "Grim" was screened in Portugal, the audience applauded at the end but there was "a dead silence through most of the film. Later, someone came up to me and said, 'We don't laugh about death here. Europeans don't laugh about death.'"

Besides "Grim," Schnall has another new short, "Unsavory Avery," which will appear as part of Expanded Entertainment's fourth "Animation Celebration" feature. Expanded asked Schnall and others to animate their own interpretations of Tex Avery's style. Schnall's entry is a spin on Avery's trademark nightclub situation (in films such as "Red Hot Riding Hood"), with sex roles reversed.

Already at work on his next project, Schnall says he is "now building a 2 1/2 foot cockroach. No, I won't tell you why."

Michael Zodorozny is currently finishing work on "Centrifuge," the third in a trilogy of personal films, scheduled for completion in March. The two other titles are "Blueprint" and "Eye on the World."

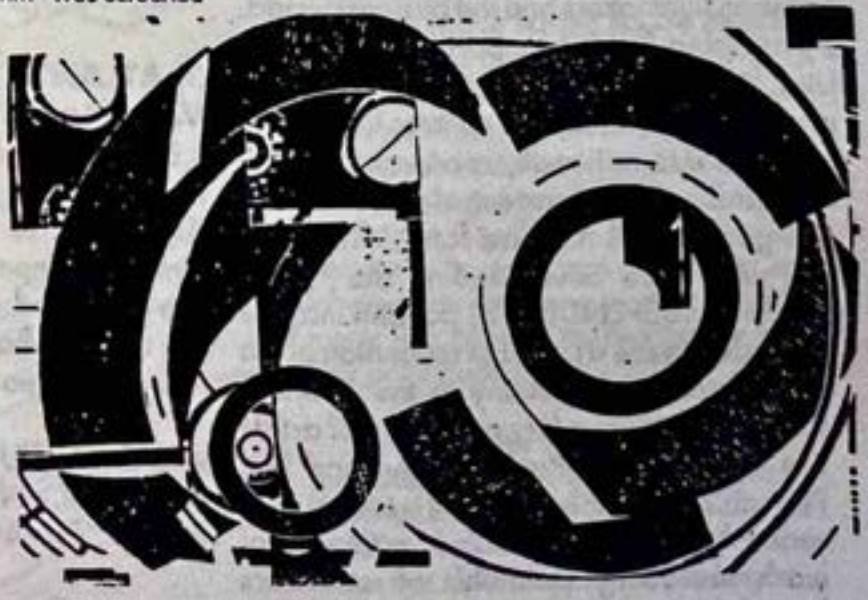
Zodorozny has been at work on the trilogy for the past five years, whenever he has not been busy with commercial projects (most recently as color stylist on Jumbo Pictures' series "Doug"). Unusually at peace with his dual roles in the industry, Zodorozny is nevertheless pleased, he says, to be finishing his own film. "It's Deal-with-it Year. I really got back in touch with my stuff. I feel pretty solid about it and know where I'm coming from."

The three films, he says, constitute an "abstract, absolute kind of genre."

The first, "Blueprint," consists wholly of hand-painted images. The second, "Eye on the World," is entirely collage. "Centrifuge," the third film, synthesizes the techniques of the first two and incorporates photographic images which, though representational in themselves, become integrated within the abstract environment. Recurrent images include manipulated photographs of hand-painted doors and architectural elements.

Zodorozny has worked with photographic manipulations before. For the performance art troupe Disturbed Form Theater, he designed slides and film to be projected directly onto inflated stage props. "My films are a culmination of that, what I've done since then.

"It's mixed media the way I arrive at the image...There's a lot you can do with animation that hasn't been done yet, and a lot of formality gets in the way of realizing it."



*Collage from "Centrifuge."*
*© 1992 by Michael Zodorozny.*

# FILM ANIMATION AS A TOOL IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

## David Ehrlich

In the past ten years, in the U.S., there has been a great proliferation in the use of all art forms as an adjunct to various forms of psychotherapy. Dance Therapy, Art Therapy, and Psychodrama have all emerged as major components of psychotherapy, both in institutional settings and in private offices. There has, until now, been little development of film as a medium of therapy. The need for both technical expertise and also for rather complex and expensive equipment has made this particular art form one of the last to be utilized.

There are qualities unique to the creation of film, however, and especially film animation, which make it especially appropriate for both a diagnostic and a therapeutic role. Even the most technically unsophisticated medium of flipbooks can be introduced with great success to a group of individuals who have had little or no background in either art or film. The playfulness of the medium releases normal inhibitions on expression, while the existence of the medium-in-time-duration, decelerated to 1/24th of a second, permits a concentration that joins external artistic expression to one's deepest personal fears, dreams and associations. In the months to follow, I'll present some examples of the therapeutic use of animation.

### Part One: ANIMATION THERAPY IN AN ALCOHOLISM TREATMENT CENTER

In the institutional setting of an alcoholism ward at Manhattan State Hospital, I provided a group of recovering alcoholics with an elementary exercise in flipbooks. Each individual began with a drawing of a simple whiskey bottle at the bottom of a small memo pad, and then proceeded to move the bottle in succeeding drawings from side to side and backwards and forwards, until he/she had grown comfortable with both the animation technique and the image itself. Finally, participants were asked gradually to transform the bottle into a face that seemed to be "inherent" in the image of the bottle. In subsequent AA meetings and therapy sessions, individuals were encouraged to talk about the face: Was it a man or a woman? Was the face kind or stern? Was it happy or sad? Could it be a family member, a friend or a stranger? It became clear to some that the bottle was indeed a kind of representation or symbol of a parent, a lover, or a good friend and that the emptiness and anxiety felt when attempting to withdraw from alcohol was not only physiologically symptomatic but also connected to other more deeply-rooted emotions of human separation--emotions that could be softened to some extent by an awareness of them as well as a reaching out to others, in this case, to those in the program.

The following week, I went on to a more directed project for which each individual was asked to begin a flipbook with a drawing of a neutral figure enclosed within a giant bottle. The bottle was to have a tapered top, making escape quite difficult, but remaining in the bottle deprived the figure of food and other human relationships. Now that the participants had learned the elementary principles of animation, they were asked to find a way, within the parameters created by the logic of the situation, to gain physical and human sustenance, and to animate their solution. The ingenuity, and the perseverance with which each individual tolerated enough artistic frustration to find a way out for his/her figure, expressed in a remarkably accurate diagnostic model, the prognosis for recovery in the program. Several individuals actually introduced secondary characters who were enticed to climb into the bottle with food and drink, only to be themselves inadvertently trapped. Some did not attempt to devise stratagems of escape but merely had their character sit at the bottom of the bottle and go to sleep. Still others found ways of jumping or climbing out, or even of smashing the bottle from the inside. Subsequent discussions about the artistic processes involved encouraged the recovering alcoholics to think about and to better understand the implications of the artistic choices made.

Two of those who had introduced the second trapped character had indeed, in real life, manipulated persons close to them to begin drinking with them. Within the context of the animation, it became clear that a second trapped person not only could not help them the next time, but, moreover, would only exacerbate the physical discomfort within the bottle. Individuals who had given up quickly were surprised to see the solutions of escape successfully attempted by others, and began to question their traditional axiom that "nothing made much difference". Using the results of this second project as a reflection of each individual's will-to-recovery, the counselors were able to proceed to more individualized recovery plans.

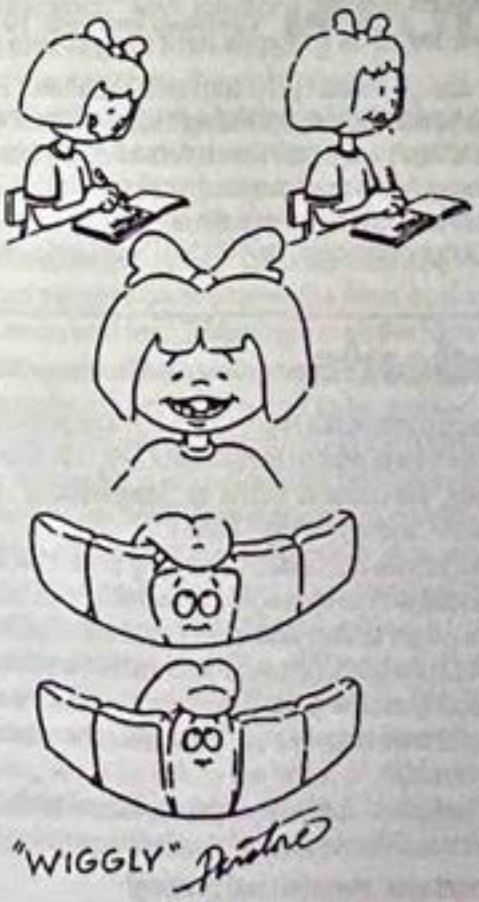
# NEW YORK UPDATE

BY TOM WARBURTON

Is it me or did the month of December just blow right by like a runaway taxi on an icy road? It seems like it was just yesterday that I was at the opening for Expanded Entertainment's Canadien Film Board compilation having a couple drinks and before I knew it I was at the Jumbo Pictures Christmas party. Another mere moment passed and I was hanging out at a party in the lobby of the New York Public Library for the Creative Black Book, then I was in Pennsylvania having a quiet Christmas with my family, and I'm not even going to get started telling you about New Year's Eve. Instead, I'll tell you about who I talked to for this month's Update.

Ovation Animation is a small family run animation studio located in the heart of Gramercy Park and has been around for a whopping 24 years. That especially amazed me because that means the studio was started right around the time I was born! The studio is run by Art Petricone who has been in the business for quite a while. Joining him in the Ovation world are his two daughters Lotte and Nina. Lotte was more then kind enough to supply me with the latest endeavors of their studio.

As in all studios, commercial work has slowed down but Ovation has had their hands on quite a few commercial spots in the past couple months. What sounded like the most involved was a spot called "Plus Marks the Spot" for the Plus money access machines. The spot included animating backgrounds, a whole lot of metamorphoses and no cuts whatsoever. Lotte claims the spot took forever to get done but proved to be very successful. Also completed were spots for Kenner toys starring none other then the infamous Joker of Batman fame, and a spot for Stain Heaven Carpet Cleaner involving 30 seconds of rotoscoping. Another spot for Stain Heaven will be coming up in the future along with a spot for Howard Johnson's restaurants where they will be animating special effects to reveal the company's logo. Last but not least, the Ovation gang is hard at work on a rap video piece to be showcased on their reel which is in production as we speak. They seem real excited about it so I'm sure it'll be something to see.




"Wiggly Tooth" by John Paratore

The next contestant on New York Update is a guy who has been in the animation business for a real long time. In fact, he tells me it's been too long of a time. John Paratore started out his career at the world famous but long since defunct Terrytoons studio. If any of you think that you're having trouble making money in the business now, you'll get a kick out of hearing that it cost John $30 dollars a week to commute to work from Fort Apache and he only made $38 a week! You got to wonder how he got lunch everyday. While John worked at Terrytoons he went from cel polisher to inbetweener and even went as far as to marry Tina Martini, the head of the ink and paint department.

Eventually the time came to leave Terrytoons and John went on to various freelance projects at Film Graphics to do the Campbell Kids. Then he went on to Animation Central where he first began assistant animating, and Ferro, Mohamed

Continued on page 17

# FILMFESTIVALS

**Part FIVE by David Ehrlich**

**1) HUESCA INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL, SPAIN (May 29-June 6)**

This annual festival is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. It's a modest event, but roughly 25% of the films in competition are animated shorts, and at least one member of the Jury is always an internationally recognized animator. They respond quickly to queries and films are returned soon after the close of the festival. No entry fee, but you must pay postage both ways for transport of your film. Deadline for entry forms is April Ist and for films, April 20th.

CERTAMEN INTERNACIONAL DE FILMS CORTOS "CIUDAD DE HUESCA". C/ Menendez Pidal, 21, 2.a C, 22004 HUESCA, SPAIN. Tel: (9) 74-22 70 58. FAX (9)74-24 66 00.

**2) HOLLAND ANIMATION FILM FESTIVAL (April 23-26)**

Under the fine hand of festival director, Gerben Schermer, this animation festival now has the aim of "being an intermediary between filmmakers and the business world. By bringing these two parties together in Utrecht, the festival organisers hope to promote an exchange of creative ideas and give internationally renowned animators the chance to demonstrate the commercial potential of their art form." Those of you who have been reading the "EAST COAST INDEPENDENTS" column may be interested to see a possible resolution of the art/commerce dichotomy in the goals of this festival. With a Jury consisting of artists like Oscar Grillo, Paul Driessen and Priit Parn, this festival shows that it is taking very seriously the Renaissance in commercial work caused by the influx of animators previously known only for their personal artistic work. Following the growth of the commercial category of the prestigious Annecy Animation Festival, the exclusive focus upon commercial work by the Holland Animation Festival recognizes the recent achievements in this field while at the same time providing a kind of showcase of styles for the business community. For 400 years, the Dutch have been dedicated pioneers in the integration of art and commerce, from diamonds to paintings, so it should be no surprise that Schermer has chosen his animation festival to be at the frontier of "artistic commercial animation." Prizes will be awarded in each of four categories:

*I)publicity and promotional films*
*2) pop promos*
*3) educational and information films*
*4) station calls ands film leaders.*

You may send any video format. Deadline is February 1st for entry forms and February 10th for films and tapes. No entry feel

HOLLAND ANIMATION FESTIVAL, Hoogt 4, 3512 GW Utrecht, HOLLAND. Tel (0)30-31 22 16 FAX:(0()30-31 29 40

**3) ATLANTA FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL (May)**

Now in its 16th year, this festival features films that are innovative, yet entertaining. About $7000 in cash is awarded to the 40 films in competition, a paltry few of which are animated. Works by southern filmmakers seem to have an edge. There is a $25 entry fee, Deadline:January 3rd.

ATLANTA FILM 7 VIDEO FESTIVAL, 75 Bennett St., NW, Suite M-1, Atlanta, GA 30309; Tel:(404)352-4254

# Letters to the EDITOR

SHARPER THAN A FLIP'S TOOTH
by Mark Langer

After reading Flip Johnson's "No Honoraria, No Film" (October), in which he complained about not receiving honoraria or rental fees from museums such as MoMA, I looked foreword to further discussion in the November issue. It was a disappointment to see no response.

I should make it clear that I am speaking for myself, although I have helped to program animation retrospectives at the Museum of Modern Art and elsewhere at intervals over the last seventeen years. In all that time, I do not recall a single request from a filmmaker for a fee of any kind. Instead, filmmakers often have come to the Museum or other institutions, at their own expense, to participate in screenings of their work.

These filmmakers believe that the imprimature of a major art institution is a valuable tool to make their work known to the public. While ASIFA members regularly attend festivals in places like Ottawa or Annecy, the general public does not. The Museum of Modern Art brings this work closer to home. More importantly, the standing of this institution within the community presents the art of animation as "serious stuff" to a public that often regards animation as something only for children. I recently saw Flip Johnson's PULP at the Society for Animation Studies Conference in Rochester. Undoubtedly, this fine film will be seen by other professionals. But will it be seen by the broader public, or be noticed by the press without the kind of reputation-building exposure offered by MoMA and other similar institutions?

Flip Johnson acknowledges that MoMA is underfunded, but maintains that too much of the burden of presenting animation programs falls upon the artists, whose creativity and devotion are at the very heart of the program. "The museum pays UPS, Fed-Ex, Con-Edison, the projectionist, and the curators." says Johnson. Johnson forgets that these companies and the projectionist have nothing else to gain from shipping or projecting the films of an artist. The artist does.

As for the curators, the animation week at MoMA is clearly a labour of love. Animation retrospectives can be a nightmare to program. Where a feature film screening means booking one film from one source, an animation programme means booking may films from many sources. For example, the short programme of Shamus Culhane films recently shown at MoMA was composed of eight theatrical prints and a reel of television commercials. After a search of dozens of possible sources via long distance and fax, the films were finally located in six different places. Additional permission to screen the films had to be obtained from several other sources - more long distance and fax. Shipping for all the films had to be individually arranged. Because some of the prints were nitrate, an extra projectionist had to be hired. The logistics of inspecting prints and assembling the program had to be worked out. Programme notes had to be written, typed, printed and distributed. Funds had to be raised for advertising, and ads placed. Now multiply all of the above for each animation programme presented at MoMA, and you have some idea what it means for MoMA to present an annual week of animation.

This effort on the part of the Museum staff does not profit them one bit. On the contrary, it is a further burden on a budget already strained to the breaking point. From a cost-efficency basis, programming animation at MoMA makes no sense at all. It is the curators' love of animation, and devotion to the promotion of the work of animators that leads them to do this. I can only imagine what they must have though when Flip Johnson demanded that his protest at not receiving an honorarium be inserted into the programme note.

I, for one, want to salute the work of Adrienne Mancia, Jytte Jensen, Ron Magliozzi, and the many other devoted staff members of MoMA who have worked so hard to promote the films of animators in New York. May their kind increase.

continued on next page

# NEWS

## THE 13TH ANNUAL ACE AWARDS

*Congratulations to the following shows that have been nominated Best Animated Programming Special or Series*

"Darkwing Duck," the Disney Channel
"Doug," Nickelodeon
"Liquid TV," MTV Productions
"The Woman Who Raised a Bear as Her Son," The Disney Channel
***"and the winner is....(May I have the envelope please..)..***
**"The Woman Who Raised a Bear as Her Son" The Disney Channel**

## THE GOLDEN GLOBE AWARDS

*The categories for which animated films have been nominated:*

**Best Motion Picture Musical or Comedy:**
"Beauty and the Beast"

**Best Original Score, Motion Picture:**
"Beauty and the Beast"

**Best Original Song, Motion Picture:**
"Beauty and the Beast," from "Beauty and the Beast"
"Be Our Guest," from "Beauty and the Beast"
"Dreams to Dream," from "An American Tail II: Fievel Goes West."

## MALAISE IN BOOMTOWN

Continued from page 10

Ellie Dylan and others like her, perhaps for naivete, perhaps for daring to have the gall to tell professionals how it's supposed to be done. But a lot of old-timers and not-so-old-timers in this business are real worried right now because of what's *not* happening, not because of what is. Who's an independent and who's not, whose work is Art and whose does not merit comment, these are exercises in frivolity when the badge of honor is who's able to make their rent this month. "It's got to get better," says an artist who's been out of film school for four years (and is *currently*, she says, working), with a positive attitude that belies her insistence upon anonymity here. "It's a strange business," said Michael Sporn, and it looks like it'll get stranger still before things even out again.

## East Coast Independents

Continued from page 8

Suppose an independent spends most of his/her time doing commercials to pay the rent on a large estate on Long Island, and is waiting for a few weeks in August for the free time to work on that personal film. Is this independent, independent? What is your notion of "get by", if indeed, this notion is critical to "independence". And what proportion of time spent on personal films would constitute "making personal films"?

2) John brought up an "insidious way in which we all lose our independence"—letting the market dictate the content or length of our films. How many of us have wrestled with an even more subtle problem—defining what it is we wish to do in a personal film roughly a year before we are to start work on it? I refer to the writing of grant proposals in the degree of specificity required to bring down the grant. To make matters worse, suppose the artist traditionally works at "straight-ahead" animation, exploring as s/he goes. This doesn't make for a solid grant proposal, and anything more specific would limit the artist unnecessarily a year later when the grant may come through.

3) On a more philosophical note, why do we speak of "animator" and "independent animator" yet in visual arts, of" artist" and" commercial artist". Is this primarily a historical discrepancy or is our language saying something significant about the different values society places upon animation and painting?

# SEND IN YOUR FILM

BIG MUDDY FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL, February, Illinois
Competitive festival for independent film and animation.
Deadline: Feb. 1. Contact: Big Muddy Film Festival, Dept of Cinema & Photography, S. Illinois University at Carbondale, Carbondale, IL 62901; 618-453-1475

SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
May 14-June 7, Washington
Deadline: March 15. Contact: Darryl MacDonald, Seattle International Film Festival, 801 East Pine Street, Seattle, WA 98122;
phone: 206-324-9996; fax: 206-324-9998

SLICE OF LIFE FILM AND VIDEO SHOWCASE,
July 10 -11, Pennsylvania
Deadline: April 1. Contact: Sedgwick Heskett, director, Slice of Life Film & Video Showcase, Documentary Resource Center, 106 Boalsburg Pike, Box 909, Lemont, PA 16851; phone: 814-234-1945

USA FILM FESTIVAL, April 23-30 Texas
Short film/video competition showcases new & significant US work. Cash prizes awarded in categories of animation ($1,000), experimental ($1,000), Charles Samu Award ($500);
Deadline: March 2, Contact: Richard Peterson, artistic director, Ann Alexander, managing director, USA Film Festival, 2917 Swiss Ave., Dallas, TX 75226; phone: 214-821-6300; fax: 214-821-6364

WORLDFEST - HOUSTON INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
April 24-May 3, Texas
Premiering over 100 features & 200 shorts.
Deadline: March 2, Contact: J. Hunter Todd, director, 25th WorldFest, Box 56566, Houston, TX 77256-6566; phone: 713-965-9955; fax: 713-965-9960

CANNES INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, May, France
For info & accreditation, contact: Catherine Verret, French Film Office, 745 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10151; phone 212-832-8860; fax: 212-755-0629

ANN ARBOR FILM FESTIVAL, March 17-22
Oldest 16mm festival in the country.
Deadline: Feb. 15, Contact: Vicki Honeyman, festival director, Ann Arbor Film Festival, Box 8232, Ann Arbor, MI 48107; phone 313-995-5356

CAROLINA FILM & VIDEO FESTIVAL, March 19-21, North Carolina
Showcasing documentaries, narratives, experimental and animated works.
Deadline: March 1, Contact: Michael Frierson, Carolina Film & Video Festival, Broadcasting/Cinema Division, Carmichael Building, UNC-Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27412; phone: 919-334-5360

MIXED SIGNALS
The award-winning cable television series produced by the New England Foundation for the Arts, is accepting submissions for its upcoming series of short works featuring Humor, Satire and Surrealism.
Deadline: February 21, Contact: Mixed Signals, New England Foundation for the Arts, 678 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 801, Cambridge, MA 02139

# Letters to the EDITOR

January, 1992

To the editor:

David Ehrlich writes of Independents and independence. With this article he offered us the usual game of semantics espoused by a group in the 70's who wanted to call themselves artists, but knowing the term to be pretentious called themselves "independents."

An independent, is one who is not dependent on another. It's as simple as that. In film, Hollywood style, an independent is a mini-studio that produces films (e.g. Morgan Creek which produced Kevin Costner's $40 million Robin Hood) and then shops those films around to major studios to distribute. Long-term deals can be made and natural partnerships result, but the mini stays a mini and is independent.

In those terms, I can think of only one studio in animation that isn't independent: Walt Disney. Even Hanna-Barbera is a self-sufficient commodity producing films that they take out to market to sell (though one wonders if this will change now that Ted Turner owns them).

For those artists that want to call themselves "Independent," they shouldn't wrestle with words, or they'll be caught out in the snow. Rather, they should just concentrate on making films. There's a real shortage of intelligent, (independent OR commercial) good films right now, especially films that have something....anything to say.

Michael Sporn

# NEW YORK UPDATE

Continued from page 12

and Schwartz, where he got his first job as a full fledged animator. Later he and two other artists opened up a studio called Poverty Pictures which John claims did a wonderful job of living up to its name.

Fortunately, John has had better luck with the studio he and his wife opened up in 1970 called Paratore Pictures Limited. They say that they put the limited on the end because it stands for limited funds. While most studios depend on commercials to stay afloat John and Tina have relied on educational films which they find an incredible amount of freedom in. Such projects include a whole lot of openings for Sesame Street both here and abroad as well as projects for The Electric Company, and 3-2-1 Contact. Just recently, John has finished up work on a three and a half minute spot on dental care that will be running through school systems trying to get kids to brush properly. The film stars a little girl named Julia and involves the horrors she puts her teeth through until she learns how important it is to take care of them. Last but not least, John will be a returning animation director at Jumbo Pictures for the next season of Nickelodeon's "Doug" which has been recently nominated for a cable television ACE Award.

Well, I'm going to sign off now, but next month I'll have some more news on the New York animation scene to rattle off to you. Big thanks go out to both Lotte and John for their cooperation.